

Self Care

1.0 Introduction

Hoosiers will need to have access to basic information for caring for individuals with influenza. This information may support caring for a family member or providing self care. The information provided outlines how people will know if they have influenza and basic advice on care.

2.0 Background Information

An influenza pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus appears for which the human population has little or no immunity. As a result, large numbers of people will likely become sick. In Jennings County alone, it is predicted that 4200 to 9800 will become sick. As a result, the health care system will face huge demands for services. The system will be under additional strain due to a reduction in the number of health care workers who are themselves sick or off work in order to care for sick family members.

It has been estimated that:

- about 45% of people who get sick with influenza will not require medical care, but will need health information and advice;
- about 53% will require outpatient or primary care (e.g. treatment by a family doctor);
- 1.5 to 2% will need to be hospitalized.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide some basic health information and advice for people who are sick at home with influenza or are caring for a sick person in their home.

3.0 How Do I Know if I Have Influenza?

Symptoms

Infection with influenza can result in a wide range of illness. Half of the infected people will experience symptoms and the other half may not have any symptoms. Symptoms may include:

- Sudden onset of fever, headache, chills, muscle aches, physical exhaustion, and a dry cough.
- Subsequent onset of sore throat, stuffy or runny nose, and worsening cough.
- Children may also feel sick to their stomach, vomit or have diarrhea.
- Elderly and immune compromised people may not develop a fever.
- Most people recover in 7-10 days.

It is likely that you or a family member have influenza if Jennings County Health Department has announced that pandemic influenza is circulating in our community and you have the following symptoms:

- A sudden onset
- Fever ($> 38^{\circ}\text{C}$) AND
- Cough AND

- One or more of the following: sore throat, muscle aches, or fatigue and physical exhaustion

4.0 How do I Know if I Have a Fever?

Fever related to an illness is a sign that the body is fighting an infection. Sometimes we think someone has a fever by simply touching their forehead or neck but it is important to confirm a fever by checking their temperature. We can measure a person's temperature by using a thermometer placed in the mouth (oral), the ear (tympanic), under the armpit (axillaries), or in the bum (rectal). The use of glass mercury thermometers is not recommended as mercury is a toxic substance and there is a risk that glass may be easily broken. Ideally, a digital thermometer should be used for taking oral, axillaries or rectal temperatures; and a special ear thermometer should be used for taking a tympanic temperature. You can buy a thermometer at your drug store.

You or your child has a fever if:

- The rectal temperature is 38.5°C (101.3°F) or higher.
- The oral/tympanic temperature is 38°C (100.4°F) or higher.
- The axillaries temperature is 38°C (100.4°F) or higher.

5.0 What Can I Do at Home to Treat a Fever?

- Dress in lightweight clothing and keep the room temperature around 20°C
- Drink plenty of cool fluids in order to replace fluids lost in sweat. If the person who is sick has urine (pee) that is darker than usual, they need to drink more.
- Offer small, nutritious meals, as people sick with the flu may not be very hungry.
- Take acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol™, Tempra™). Use the dose and schedule recommended on the package or by your doctor or pharmacist. Ibuprofen (e.g. Advil™, Motrin™) may be used for children older than six months and for adults. Do not give acetylsalicylic acid, also known as ASA, (e.g. Aspirin™) to anyone under 18 years of age with the flu because it can lead to brain and liver damage (Reye's syndrome).

6.0 How Can I Treat Other Symptoms of Influenza?

There are many over-the-counter cough and cold medicines sold in drug stores and other stores that do not require a doctor's prescription. These include things like decongestants, cough syrups, nasal drops, and antihistamines. These medicines do not necessarily work and may not be safe in some cases. They should not be given to children under three years of age unless prescribed by a doctor. Check with your pharmacist or doctor before giving these medicines to anyone else or taking them yourself. This is especially important for anyone under 12 years of age, or on medications, or with a chronic medical condition.

- Get plenty of rest.
- Gargle with salt water if you have a sore throat.
- Use a cool mist humidifier to help with a stuffy nose.
- If a baby is having problems breathing because of a stuffy nose, use a rubber suction bulb to clear the mucous. These are available at drug stores. You may also use saline nose drops or spray if the mucous is very thick.

7.0 When Should I See a Doctor?

The decision on when to seek medical attention can be complicated by many factors which may include things like age, existing health problems, or current medications, to name a few. Below are some points to think about when you are trying to decide whether or not you need to seek medical advice. You may get advice from your family doctor/general practitioner, If your symptoms are severe and you think you need immediate attention, go to the closest hospital emergency department or call 911.

Adults

If you are a normal healthy person and have been suffering with the flu, it is time to call your doctor, health line or 911 if:

- You become short of breath while resting or doing very little.
- Your breathing is difficult or painful.
- You are coughing up bloody sputum.
- You are wheezing.
- You have had a fever for three or four days and you are not getting better – or you may be getting worse.
- You have started to feel better, and suddenly you get a high fever and start to feel sick again.
- You or others note that you are extremely drowsy and difficult to wake up or that you are disoriented and confused.
- You have extreme pain in your ear.

Seek medical attention as soon as possible, in order to prevent your condition from worsening. Bacteria may have infected your damaged tissues. At this point your doctor may consider giving you an antibiotic.

If you have heart or lung disease or any other chronic condition that requires regular medical attention, if you are frail, if you have an illness, or if you are on treatments or medications that affect your immune system and you get the flu, call your doctor.

If you are living with a long-term illness, your doctor may suggest changes to your usual management routine and/or provide you with extra help in treating the flu and preventing complications, such as prescribing an antiviral medication. Antiviral medications must be taken within 48 hours of the first symptoms to be effective so call your doctor right away.

Children

The Jennings County Health Department recommends that you should contact your doctor or take your child to the emergency department if your child has symptoms of influenza and:

- Has lung or heart disease, has an illness or is taking treatment that affects the immune system, takes acetylsalicylic acid (ASA or Aspirin) regularly for a medical condition or has any other chronic illness requiring regular medical care.
- Is less than 3 months old and has a rectal temperature over 38.5°C.
- Has trouble breathing when resting, is wheezing, has chest pain when breathing or is coughing up bloody sputum (phlegm).
- Drinks very little fluid and has not urinated at least every 6 hours when awake.
- Has vomiting or has severe diarrhea.
- Is constantly irritable and will not calm down.
- Is listless, not interested in playing with toys or unusually sleepy.
- Still has a fever and is not feeling better after 5 days or was feeling better and suddenly develops a new fever.

Take your child immediately to a hospital emergency department or call 911 if your child:

- Has severe breathing trouble or blue lips.
- Is limp or unable to move.
- Is hard to wake up or does not respond.
- Has a stiff neck.
- Seems confused.
- Has a seizure (convulsion/fit).